

Research Brief

Parent Involvement

Question: What are some ways in which to get parents meaningfully involved in their child's high school?

Summary of Findings:

“Now that my child is in high school, he does not want or need me to be around him as much as when he was younger,” “I don't want to hinder my child's independence by being too actively involved in her life,” “My child is almost an adult and I need to trust that he'll make appropriate decisions and he won't be able to do that if my presence is too perceptible.” These are some common reasons parents give for not volunteering in their child's secondary school. At the elementary level, parents are highly visible in schools and as the children get older, there are fewer parent volunteers. The needs of secondary students are different than those at the elementary level, so the type of involvement from parents should reflect those differences. Research is continuously clear that students whose parents are actively engaged in their academic lives tend to: experience more academic success; enjoy school; are less likely to be retained, suspended or expelled; are often in higher level programs; are less likely to participate in violent behavior; are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities; are socially well-adjusted; and go on to some type of post-secondary education. “The crux of family-school involvement at the middle and high school is determining the kinds of adult interactions that not only allow teenagers to have autonomy and respect but also meet the needs of families and schools” (*Engaging families at the secondary level: What schools can do to support family involvement*).

According to the research, the most successful programs are those that provide a variety of ways in which parents can be actively engaged in their child's academic life. Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools, out of Johns Hopkins, has established six types of parent involvement.

Type 1: Parenting-provide workshops and training for parents in child/adolescent development and ways to meet the needs of their child that is conducive to their learning.

Type 2: Communicating-get in contact with parents about the school, its programs and activities.

Type 3: Volunteering-ways in which to get parents and community activity engaged in the school community.

Type 4: Learning at Home-types of activities parents can help their child at home with their work.

Type 5: Decision Making-include parents in school decisions and advocacy.

Type 6: Collaborating with community-coordinate community services and support.

Some specific ways in which parents can become more meaningfully engaged and involved in their child's school and/or academic life include:

- Communicate regularly and openly. Make certain not to use "educationese." Some schools are finding email the most effective form of two-way communication.
- Contact parents when their child has done something positive. This will help eliminate the stigma that the school only calls when there is a problem.
- Send information about their child's courses that could include descriptions of the specific content to be covered, projects to be completed, skills to be learned and ways in which parents can help their child at home. This could begin during the summer and include things the student and parent could be doing to be prepared for the following school year. Some schools create course specific web sites.
- Invite, encourage and support parent volunteers. Let parents know specifically what they can do at home to help their child as well as what they can do to support the school. Invite parents to speak in classes about specific skills and/or talents they possess.
- Establish a parent volunteer center at school with information materials available on pertinent issues/concerns such as: post-secondary educational options, financial aid for post-secondary, counseling services, drug education, health and safety.
- Form different focus groups for a variety of areas. This will encourage more than a few people to be overly involved and give the appearance that the school might be closed to new participants. Have members bring a friend to a focus group.
- Meet with parents on their turf.
- Ask for concerns, then address them.

- Hold a few valuable workshops. One high school worked with parents to establish a handbook for parents on what to do to find the “right” college for their child. Another high school held a workshop for parents in February, after they had received their wage statements but had not yet filed taxes. By the end of the workshop, they had completed the appropriate financial aid application forms.
- Provide family and student school and classroom visits.
- Establish a phone tree as a means of contacting parents about specific school/course information.
- Have a homework hotline, so parents can access information regarding their child’s homework.
- Create assignments that involve the family.
- Hold programs where the students showcase their work and/or projects.
- Be cognizant of the diverse cultures of the students and families. Provide translators, transportation to the school for meetings and child care.

Online Resources:

- A dozen activities to promote parent involvement
This is a succinct list of ideas to get parents involved in their child’s education.
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr200.shtml
- A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, community connections on student achievement
A description for the rationale of community and schools working together, along with active links to sites on parental involvement are given in this article.
<http://www.ncpie.org/WhatsHappening/researchJanuary2006.html>
- Center on school, family and community partnerships
This is a brief overview of the six types of family involvement based from the model devised by Joyce Epstein.
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm>
- College and career guide

This is an overview of a college guide developed jointly by parents and staff of a high school in Illinois.

<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/2006/pdf/41.pdf>

- Curriculum showcase
A summary of a curriculum showcase of a Maryland high school and its community is described in this piece.
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/2006/pdf/57.pdf>
- Developing a collaborative team approach to support family and community connections with schools: What can leaders do?
Things that leaders can do to help open up family and community participation are presented in this article.
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/research-brief3.pdf>
- Engaging families at the secondary level: What schools can do to support family involvement
Ideas on ways to involve parents of secondary students are given in this article.
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb3-Secondary.pdf>
- Epstein's six types of family involvement
A list and description of the six types of family involvement are given in this article.
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/initiatives/familycommunity/files/epsteinframework.pdf>
- Financial aid workshop for parents
This is a description of a workshop on helping parents complete financial aid forms.
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/2006/pdf/42.pdf>
- Getting involved in your child's education
A brief overview of the importance of parental involvement is described in this piece.
<http://www.nea.org/parents/index.html?mode=print>

- Honor recognition assembly
A description of an honor roll assembly at an alternative high school in Washington is given in this article.
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/2006/pdf/27.pdf>
- Most direct route to parents is E-line
Some effective techniques for using email as a communication tool are provided in this article.
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/voice/voice113.shtml
- National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools
This is the home page that is connected to annotations on resources for purchase on family and community involvement in schools.
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/>
- National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
This is the home page for this organization that has active links to resources, developing partnerships and disabilities education.
<http://www.ncpie.org/>
- Navigating the course selection process
This is a description of a parent workshop on the course selection process.
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/2006/pdf/53.pdf>
- Parent involvement
An overview of research done on parent involvement is presented in this piece.
<http://www2.edweek.org/rc/issues/parent-involvement/>
- Parent involvement in education
This is an extensive review on the literature about parent involvement.
<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu6.html>
- Reaching out to diverse populations: What can schools do to foster parent-community connections?



Issues to consider when reaching out to families from diverse populations is presented in this article.

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb5-diverse.pdf>

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By: Dr. Karen Walker Lebanon Valley College

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